



Primary and Secondary Sources

Understanding and 'Reading' History

What is a Primary Source?

A primary source is a document that was **created at the time** of the event or subject you've chosen to study or by people who were observers of or participants in that event or topic.

A primary source can be anything, including written texts, objects, buildings, films, paintings, cartoons, etc. What makes the source a "primary" source is when it was made, not what it is. For example, if you were studying the Great Depression of the 1930s, a good primary source to look at would be articles from the New York Times digital archive (available online, articles from 1851, fees involved) that were written **at the time**.

Primary sources do not include texts written by historians about this topic because they have been written at a later date. These are **secondary sources**.

What are Secondary Sources?

Secondary sources are texts and documents written by historians and researchers at a later date. These texts (such as your school textbooks) may include references to primary sources, however as they are written at a later date they are considered secondary.

How to analyze a Primary Source

- **What is it?**
- **When and by whom was this particular document written or object created? If you're analyzing a document, what is its format? Has the photograph you're studying been edited or cropped?**
- **Was the document published? If so, when and where and how? Can you assess from the document the author's historical and cultural position, and that of the intended audience?**
- **Who is the author/creator, and why did he or she create the document/object?**
- **Using clues from the document itself, its form, and its content, who is the intended audience for the text? Is the audience regional? National?**

These questions inform us of the purpose of the document or object. NOTHING is written or made without purpose. We must consider these questions when analyzing a primary source to understand its purpose, and to gain insight to a particular part of history.

Using Public History in your Classroom

Public history can be everything around you. Implemented in the public sphere, it makes history relevant to government, school, community, technology, families, neighborhoods, morning walks and daily routines. The neighborhood that you live in, the local store you frequent, conversations and stories with older relatives all fall under the incredible umbrella of Public History. Things like oral histories, architecture, the simplicity of bricks, and a fire insurance map that constructs the city over a time period. The El Paso Museum of History has hundreds of resources that should be taken advantage of for future projects that all disciplines can focus on.

A few examples of interdisciplinary projects and lessons are

Social Studies

Students can focus on their own family trees. It can be a very generic tree with pictures and the ancestry line; however students will need to interview the oldest member of their family. Oral histories are often used throughout public history to look at different time periods. Although the interview is being given in present time it is still considered a primary source. A minimum 10 questions should be prepared before the interview. Once the interview begins students will be able to look at history through not only a different resource but a perspective that is unique through family.

Art

A unique trait that Public History discusses and focuses on is art mural. The city of El Paso has wonderful art museums that are unique, colorful and enormous, taking up entire sides of buildings. The use of murals throughout the downtown area of El Paso is not only representation of different art pieces throughout our community but a cultural representation of the people and the history as well. The project would be to look at the different forms of art, whether it is graffiti or murals or religious displays and create their own large mural representing their positions on their community, culture and history.

Literature and English

Public History is rich in literature and writing. There are books such *Los de Abojo* - Mariano Azuela that was written prior to the Mexican Revolution in El Paso's Segundo Barrio. The book focuses on the lower class of Mexico and can be traced to the people as a motivation and inspiration for revolution. A walking tour of El Paso will take you to the home in which it was written. It is with this information that students have the opportunity to graphically show through a presentation the influences of literature on society and the birth place of a revolution.

Music

One of the most amazing experiences that Public History offers you is the opportunity to learn and listen to different forms of music's. The unique approach to music could be waking done a street in downtown El Paso. As you approach different shops you will hear different forms of music coming out of each shop door. Sounds of Rock n Roll, Banda or even Korean Pop music. If you were to take the time to listen you could hear how different sounds will influence the cultural movement of people. The project would focus on movements of different groups throughout the neighborhoods. Where did these groups come from and how do they represent groups of people in El Paso today with the music they listen to.

Science

Looking through archives can be one of the most exciting things for a historian. Dark rooms filled with old census records and newspapers could be a new haven for a field like science. The industrialization of the United States came to us at the end of the 19th century, greatly affecting the ecological system of the United States. A comparative study using newspapers, business files and census records could aid in researching the effects of pollution, development and railroad expansion on the eco system of the Southwest of the United States and New England area. A more specific focus could be on the growth of El Paso on the environment when the railroad first came to El Paso in the early 1880's to bring copper and silver to ASARCO.

Mathematics

Mathematics is often overlooked as the focus on historical research however the need and consistent use of math is great with the field. A public history project for mathematics would be to look at local census records. El Paso has a very unique population of peoples. There is a constant flow of immigrants that came into El Paso through Mexico. Ellis Island, Angel Island and El Paso's Bridge of the North are the three largest points of entry into the United States. Going through the data and information of people and the growth of the city will keep the connection between the public history of the community and organization of data.

Meet DIGIE, El Paso's digital historian



What is DIGIE?

DIGIE stands for Digital Information Gateway In El Paso.

DIGIE is the family-friendly name chosen for the 2012 Quality of Life Bond Program project that began as the Digital Wall. Shown on touch sensitive TV screens, Digie is a vast collection of images and videos exploring El Paso's past and present interpreting our region through time, neighborhoods, and themes.

Where can you use DIGIE?

The collection of images that powers DIGIE can be browsed from the permanent Digital Wall located at the El Paso Museum of History. The 3-D touch screens are available only at the El Paso Museum of History and through Mini-DIGIE. Mini-Digie is a smaller, portable version of Digie. The El Paso Museum of History plans to take Mini-DIGIE to classrooms, malls, community centers, and other places where people gather - this way the opportunity to experience El Paso's history can be enjoyed by all. You can also access these images by going to DIGIE'S website, www.digie.org.

How do you use DIGIE?

The permanent DIGIE Wall and Mini-DIGIE can be used by anyone. Use your fingertips to move through the 3-D City, or tap on a specific image to read information about it and to find related images. You can write about your DIGIE experience on our GUESTBOOK, or add your own comment to any image you see on the DIGIE Wall or website. You can also upload your own family photographs or recent images to www.digie.org. To participate, click login, agree to the terms of use, and then register your new account. A confirmation email will be sent to you with a first time user's link – so check all your e-mail boxes!

*If you have any questions email us at digitalwall@elpasotexas.gov.

Ways to use DIGIE in your classroom

Purpose:

- For people to take part in the history of their family, communities, city, state, country and the world.
- To bring neighborhoods together around local history and help people feel closer to the place they live in.
- To have people from different generations talking more, sharing more and coming together more often.
- To create a study resource for schools and universities.
- To be a global archive of El Paso history.

Ideas for use:

- ★ Use the DIGIE's Quest to learn how to use DIGIE.

Writing/English

- Use a photograph to prompt:
 - Fiction story telling
 - Poetry
 - Newspaper article
 - Diary entry
- Research: photographs as a primary/secondary source or the basis of the thesis
- Use a series of photographs to tell a story whether fiction or non-fiction.

History

- Use photographs as a tool to sort in chronological order or into groups of eras
- Students can explore/upload photos from a particular community or the city as a whole to show similarities/differences in living conditions, transportation, employment, fashion, attitudes then explore the causes that change.
- Using photographs and video as primary and secondary sources to support research.
- Upload their own photographs and video of themselves, school, clubs, families... and tell their own stories.
- Explore DIGIE by the date/year of birth
- Finding photos of a single person and piecing together their journey

Science

- Explore and research plants and animals in El Paso and the Chihuahuan Desert
- Go out into the environment, take pictures and video and upload their own data/research

Questions to ask yourself:

- How are people's memories affected by photography?
- How do you think people's stories are affected by their memories?
- What makes someone choose to take a photograph?
- How has the role of photography changed over time?